

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Thank You For Your Feedback!

Thank you to the 173 Sebastopol residents who sent in your STEP Survey cards. (That's an increase of 20% over last year!)

We appreciate you letting us know what you think of this newsletter, how you use it, and what articles you'd like to see in the future.

So, what were your responses?

■ **94% said you find *The Next STEP (TNS)* newsletter helpful and interesting.** (That's up from 85% last year!) Your comments included, "Thank you for the great newsletter," "[The articles] are not only practically helpful but also very inspiring," "I think your newsletter is excellent and very important. Thank you all!", "Thanks for giving great information," "Very informative," and "Keep up the great work."

■ Of those responding about pesticide use, **49% said you use pesticides at home or work. Of these, 48% use only natural pesticides,** 19% use synthetic, and 32% use both. This is a notable shift towards natural pesticides. Last year 37% used just natural and 31% used just synthetic.

■ We were delighted that **84% of you said that this newsletter has helped you reduce your use of toxics.** (This was up from 74% last year.) It was valuable to hear your examples of what you found useful. Readers said, for instance, that you

now use vinegar for weeds instead of Roundup; don't use lawn fertilizers that have weed killer; "don't buy as many commercial cleaning products"; clean your oven with our borax recipe — and that these solutions worked well for you. We're also delighted to hear that you're sharing this information with others.

Congratulations to everyone who is finding ways to reduce or avoid using toxics! With these choices, you're supporting a healthier environment for yourself, your family, and your community.

Thank you for your many excellent questions and ideas for future articles; you'll find answers already appearing in this issue, and in upcoming editions.

And as always we appreciate your acknowledgement of our work. We're delighted to be of assistance.

Please keep your feedback coming! Your input helps us create a newsletter that's useful for you!

"Honestly, I cannot think of a more wonderful and welcome newsletter for folks opening their utility bill to enjoy! Thank you so much for your words of wisdom and compassion. The graphics are excellent as well!"

Dian H.



Got Roses?

Much has been written about growing roses organically. The most important thing is to choose hardy varieties that are known to do well in our area. If you have inherited a rose bush that isn't doing well, it might not be a good Sebastopol rose; you can ask a nursery keeper or Master Gardener (565-2621). When the plant is healthy, it is much less likely to get pests.

Here's a rose food recipe from Carole Rubin's *How To Get Your Lawn and Garden Off Drugs* (a recommended book):

- 42% blood meal
- 36% super phosphate or bone meal
- 9.5% sulphate of potash
- 7.5% kelp meal
- 5% sulphomag

This blend is sometimes available pre-mixed. At bloom time, put this mixture around the base of your plant. Use about 1/2 cup or more, depending on the size of the plant. Cover the blend with mulch (staying away from the base a couple of inches). Then water it in well.

A simpler food is to sprinkle about two cups of alfalfa meal feed pellets from a feed store (get the kind without molasses) around the drip line of each bush. This tip is from local rose enthusiast Paula (Santa Rosa).

We welcome your own tips and feedback, and hope to print more on this in the future.

~ Rebecca Dwan

To continue this project, we need more writers!

You can get your name in print, share your wisdom, and help your community. We have lots of great sources of information and the articles are usually short. If you're interested in this topic and can write clear helpful information, let's talk! Email the editor (see box on other side).



The Pepperweed Project Needs You!

In the last edition, we discussed **the problem of invasive plants in the Laguna, including pepperweed and Ludwigia**. The local community continues to discuss how to manage them, including considering proposals to use toxic herbicides over a number of years. We encourage you to learn about this topic and participate in these discussions.

Invasive plants are an issue across the U.S. and beyond. They grow quickly and can push out other plants, including natives. However, the toxics being discussed can also harm native plants and animals, humans, and the ecosystem. The methodology for managing invasives without toxics is not as developed as it is for other alternatives, although there are successful projects and approaches.

The City of Sebastopol has about two acres of land in the Laguna with pepperweed. Because of community concerns about the use of toxics, and the City's commitment not to use toxics on City land, **Sebastopol has chosen to explore ways to manage these plants non-toxically**. Through this, they hope to nurture



our corner of the Laguna while advancing the knowledge about how to handle invasives without toxics.

A number of approaches are being explored, including hand-pulling; sheet mulching; recovering pepperweed's traditional uses in food and healing; and addressing underlying causes, such as human-caused imbalances of the ecosystem.

For this program to succeed, they need your help!

Called "The Pepperweed Project," this work is currently being done

entirely by community volunteers, with significant leadership from a small local group, the Laguna Lovers. As the

Laguna Lovers say, "It takes a whole community to protect a watershed."

You can pitch in a number of ways — including hand-pulling, posting flyers, helping with planning, and exploring alternatives. You and/or your family or friends can "adopt a plot" that you maintain. Experienced permaculturists are encouraged to come share your ideas; it's a chance to put your knowledge to use in your own backyard!

Donations are also needed, for expenses and to hire a part-time volunteer coordinator.

This project is a wonderful opportunity to help protect and care for the Laguna, while innovating ways for this country to manage invasive plants. For more information, contact Craig Litwin at 829-2108.

Did You Know?

The Next STEP costs the City almost nothing. Created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense, it costs about \$60 a year plus in-house copying. This is literally a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol's \$9 million annual budget. Given the consistent evidence that common toxics are harming us all, this is a bargain for our health, now and long into the future.

Toxics & Brain Illness

Pollutants dramatically increase brain disease rates, including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. Scientists at two UK universities studied brain disease rates in ten countries (including the UK and US) from 1979–1997. Their results, published in the journal *Public Health*, showed a drastic increase in disease rates, which they conclude is linked to increased levels of pesticides, industrial effluents, car exhaust, and other pollutants.

For instance, in England and Wales they found that dementias (mainly Alzheimer's, plus other forms of senility) more than tripled among men and rose 90% among women. Other ailments, including Parkinson's, increased about 50% in every country except Japan.

"This has really scared me," said Professor Colin Pritchard of Bournemouth University, one of the report's authors. "These are nasty diseases; people are getting more of them and they are starting earlier."

As to the reason for this increase, Pritchard said genetic causes were ruled out because any DNA changes would take hundreds of years to take effect. "It must be the environment," he concluded. The most likely causes, he said, were the chemicals and pollutants used throughout our modern lives — industrial chemicals, crop pesticides, processed food, packaging, electrical goods, sofa covers, and car pollution.

He said that the increase is likely from exposure to multiple pollutants, not just one, plus the interactions of them in combination. "We have to look at the environment and ask ourselves what we are doing."

"Pollutants cause huge rise in brain diseases," The Observer, Aug. 14, 2004, <www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4993603-110418,00.html>

"What a wonderful issue! They all are and getting better. Thank you so much for writing and distributing this newsletter."

Adriane H.

ABOUT STEP

The Next STEP (TNS) is published six times a year by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program** (STEP). **STEP is a project of the City of Sebastopol**, implemented by local citizen volunteers. **STEP's mission** is to support city residents in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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